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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000320

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SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: FIFTH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL
WORKING GROUP

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. The International Working Group (IWG) held a largely uneventful fifth meeting March 17. Prime Minister Banny, UN High Representative for Election (HRE) Monteiro, and the new Chairman of Cote d'Ivoire's Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) gave presentations. Some element of drama was provoked by an Ivoirian mini-crisis involving the funeral in the rebel-held north of the brother of one of President Gbagbo's closest confidants, which was playing itself out over the course of the IWG meeting. The next meeting is April 20. The IWG is becoming increasingly less central to the political process. The sum of its impact is its monthly communiques, which only comment on the situation and, after the street disturbances in reaction to the January communique, are increasingly bland. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The International Working Group (IWG) held its fifth meeting in Abidjan on March 17. Congolese Foreign Minister Rodolphe Adada and UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Pierre Schori co-chaired the meeting. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, led the U.S. delegation. Also attending were Benin Foreign Minister Rogatien Biaou; French Cooperation Minister Brigitte Girardin; Ghanaian Foreign Minister Nana Akufo-Addo; Guinean Foreign Minister Fatouma Sidibe Kaba; Nigerian Foreign Minister Aichatou Mindaoudou; Nigerian Foreign Minister Oluyemi Adeniji; South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma; ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohamed Ibn Chambas; UN High Representative for

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Elections in Cote d'Ivoire (HRE) Antonio Monteiro; and representatives from the United Kingdom, the AU, the EU, the International Organization of French Speaking Countries, and the World Bank.

¶3. (SBU) The meeting was largely uneventful, featuring a series of presentations by Prime Minister Banny, HRE Monteiro, and the new Chairman of Cote d'Ivoire's Independent Electoral Commission Robert Beugre Mambe. No substantive decisions were made.

¶4. (SBU) Banny's presentation lasted almost two hours. He spoke for about 30 minutes then answered questions, at great length, for over an hour. Banny listed and elaborated on his accomplishments in his first 100 days in office, including the February 28 summit of Ivoirian political leaders in Yamoussoukro, the return of rebel New Forces (FN) leader Guillaume Soro's to Abidjan, and the holding of school examinations in the North for the first time since 2004. Monteiro gave a brief farewell speech -- he was about to leave his position to become Portuguese Ambassador to France.

Buegre gave a brief presentation pledging that the CEI would work in a spirit of consensus to bring about free, fair and transparent elections by October of this year.

15. (C) Some element of drama was provided by an Ivoirian mini-crisis involving the funeral in the far northern city of Korhogo for the brother of Laurent Fologo, Chairman of the Economic and Social Commission and one of President Gbagbo's closet confidants. The previous day, Fologo had attempted to drive from Abidjan to Korhogo for the funeral with an entourage of over 500 people, but the motorcade was turned back by the FN. By morning, Fologo had relented and agreed to be flown to Korhogo by UN helicopter, with an entourage of only about 50. Over the course of the morning SRSG Schori gave the IWG regular updates on Fologo's movements: when he took off from Abidjan, when he landed in Korhogo, when he was greeted warmly by the FN in Korhogo, and when he arrived in his brother's village 20 kilometers away.

16. (C) The only other matter that gave rise to some discussion was when, in the course of deciding the date of the next IWG meeting, the World Bank Representative floated the idea of combining the next meeting with a pledging session for donors to step forward with assistance to help Cote d'Ivoire implement the IWG road map. The United States and others pointed out that a pledging session was a very different thing from an IWG meeting, and the idea was dropped.

17. (C) There were also no substantive disagreements over the communique, though the ministers spent about two hours wrangling as usual over the wording of practically every sentence. The next meeting will be April 20.

18. (C) Comment. The IWG is becoming increasingly less relevant to the political situation here. Though Prime Minister Banny is happy to come to the monthly meetings to dwell on his accomplishments and bask in the IWG's praise for

ABIDJAN 00000320 002 OF 002

them, he refuses to work with the IWG's Mediation Group on a daily basis. As a result, the sum of the IWG's impact is its monthly communiques, which only comment on the situation, and which, after the violent reaction by pro-Gbagbo militias to the January communique, are increasingly bland. End Comment.

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